INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

MEMORANDUM

TO / A: Centre Governors and Officers DATE: June 8, 1981

FROM / DE: Bob Huggan

SUBJECT / OBJET: President's Speech

43894

Attached for your information is a copy of Ivan Head's most recent speech, which was delivered at the Research for Development Symposium held at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, June 1, 1981.

If you would like additional copies please let me know.

NOTES FOR REMARKS

by

IVAN L. HEAD

to

RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY

ANTIGONISH, NOVA SCOTIA

June 1, 1981

My first words are to you, Father MacKinnon, to thank you and St. Francis Xavier for your hospitality in acting as hosts to this seminar. IDRC is proud to be associated in this endeavour with a university that has long accepted the entire world as its campus, and has had an extraordinary creative effect on the minds and attitudes of persons in dozens of countries.

My colleagues and I are very pleased to be able to join in discussions about developmental issues with the research institutions of the Atlantic provinces. This region has for more than two centuries regarded itself as part of an extended trading community which included the islands of the Caribbean. In this place there is no novelty in the proposal that trading partners require a mutuality of benefit if commerce is to continue. The disappearance of that mutual benefit - or its alteration to

... 2

a markedly unbalanced relationship - is one of the issues to which the current North-South debate addresses itself. The goal of mutual advantage is stressed again and again by the Brandt Commission and indeed by the more recent report of the House of Commons Special Committee on North-South Relations. That latter committee was chaired by a Maritimer, Mr. Herb Breau.

From the Brandt Commission report, entitled "North-South: A Programme for Survival", let me quote only a single sentence: "At the beginnings of the 1980s the world community faces much greater dangers than at any time since the Second World War."

Development, as all Canadians know, is a profoundly complex, and often uneven activity. Seldom is developmental progress simultaneously advantageous to all elements of a community. Seldom are the indices of that progress both evident and acceptable. The impact of change on developing countries today is often harsh, seldom fully anticipated, and never totally absorbed. The role played by science and technology in this process of change can be every bit as brutal in social result as it was during the industrial revolution in Europe. Yet a failure to employ science and technology in the search for answers to the pressing problems of the developing countries will contribute to deteriorating, often savage, conditions. Agricultural productivity will fail to maintain pace with rising population levels. The continuing quest for fuel will diminish forest

... 3

stands often to the point of destruction. The absence of sanitary water supplies and adequate public health systems will contribute to disease and death. Inadequate economic opportunity will foment unrest and political instability.

Two hundred years ago, when seamen from this region began to set sail for distant destinations, conditions permitted the quarantine of adverse circumstances. Today our fate is influenced heavily by events far away that are inexorable in their momentum and in their capacity to encompass us. The nations of the world have become entwined inextricably in a web of inter-dependence. Neither countries as industrially powerful as the United States nor as rich in resources as Canada can regard with indifference the social and economic turmoil now so prevalent in so many regions. Those countries described as the Third World now form a significant element in the overall global economy. At this time the Third World generates some 18 per cent of world income. Third World markets play a vital role in the economies of the industrialized countries. The United States and the European Economic Community send more than one-third of all their exports to developing countries. The Japanese figure approaches one-half. In comparative terms this means that the United States exports twice as much to the developing countries as to the EEC; the EEC three times as much to the developing countries as to the United States. The collapse of Third World markets would have a disastrous effect on the economies of the North. A failure of Third World markets to grow would have a serious depressant effect upon economic activity in the North. Economic stagnation in the North can likely be overcome only by economic buoyancy in the South.

... 4

A failure to find some relief to the Third World fuel shortage will have calamitous effects on our biosphere. Close to half the world population depends on firewood and its derivative charcoal for cooking and heating. Studies estimate that some 1 billion people are able to meet their minimum requirements only by cutting wood in excess of sustainable supply. Under present trends of population growth, fuelwood demands, and forest depletion, more than 2.3 billion people will need to be provided with alternative fuels by the year 2000.

And a failure to find some response to the acute economic crises faced by so many of the developing countries will lead inevitably to political instability and to the infectious spread of insurrection and turmoil. In the words of Premier George Price of Belize: "... the only issue that counts in Central America is the North-South dialogue. If you don't bring stability and justice to the markets in sugar or coffee, you will never have stability and justice in the countries that produce them."

The contribution of science and technology to the solution of these and other developmental problems is attracting increasing attention from the international community. Indeed, the woeful incompetence of the developing countries to engage effectively in research of their own design was noted by the Pearson Commission a decade ago. Of all R & D engaged in worldwide, less than 3 per cent was then located within the

... 5

developing countries. The decision of Parliament to create IDRC in 1970 was taken in large measure as a means of contributing to that indigenous competence in those regions. The research supported by the Centre must be, insist our Governors, of a practical nature. In that respect, we attempt to encourage developing country scientists to be of the same bent as those men and women who developed England in the late 18th century. Writing of them, Bronowski says:

> "... the new inventions were for everyday use. The canals were arteries of communication; they were not made to carry pleasure boats, but barges. And the barges were not made to carry luxuries, but pots and pans and bales of cloth, boxes of ribbon, and all the common things that people buy by the pennyworth .... Technology in England was for use, up and down the country, far from the capital."

Unfortunately, not in all instances can one assume today that technology in developing countries is for common use, or that rising national incomes will contribute to the basic infrastructures and, most important, to the agriculture sectors so necessary in order to raise living standards. FAO has produced the disturbing fact that more than 100 countries in the world are currently in a food deficit position, that is they consume more food than they produce. When one realizes that the population of the

... 6

world is increasing by 100 million persons per year, and will continue to do so at least until the year 2000, and that for all practical purposes the prime arable lands are now all under food cultivation, this current food deficit circumstance is a sobering proposition. Future increases in food production will come about not from a land-based agriculture but from a science-based agriculture. It will come about as well only when governments bring into focus the attention and the discipline necessary to introduce changes in the system.

In some instances this is happening. Foodgrains production in India, for example, has risen from some 82 million metric tons annually 20 years ago to 132 million metric tons at present. India is now self-sufficient in cereal grains. But India is an exception to a worsening situation. For the third year in succession world grain stocks are expected to decline, and this notwithstanding the prospects of a bumper United States winter wheat crop. World grain production, according to FAO estimates, may drop by as much as 6 million tons this crop year. Nor are demand prospects encouraging. The International Food Policy Research Institute reports that annual imports of basic food staples into Sub-Saharan Africa increased from 2.0 million tons in the period 1961-65 to 4.6 million tons during 1973-77. IFPRI projections suggest that, with no change in currently discernible trends, net annual grain imports into that region will rise to 8-9 million tons by 1985, and to 26-30 million tons by 2000.

... 7

Why is this so? Why, with all of the effort that has been devoted to agricultural research by the international community, has there not been some pronounced gain? The problem is complex, and so is the diagnosis. It varies, too, from place to place. Yet among developing countries, there appears to be a definite correlation between growth in national income and growth in agricultural imports. An examination of the circumstances in 13 oil producing developing countries over the five year period ending in 1978 reveals the following:

Of the 12 countries capable of domestic agricultural activity, the percentage increase in national income in every instance exceeded the percentage increase in agricultural production.

In 10 of the countries the percentage increase in agricultural imports exceeded the percentage increase in agricultural production.

In 8 of the countries, the percentage increase in agricultural imports exceeded even the percentage increase in national income.

In all too many cases, sometimes with startling impact, the availability of foreign exchange earned from oil exports has led to

the importation of food rather than to an increase in domestic food production. In extreme cases, growth in food imports is outstripping growth in food production by more than 2 to 1. In these instances not only is the demand for increased food translated into off-shore purchases rather than allowed to act as a stimulus for domestic production, but the consumption patterns generated become an actual depressant for local agriculture. New tastes are developed. Convenience foods come to be favoured. Necessary but expensive capital investments in irrigation, in storage and transportation facilities, and in agricultural research are postponed.

In all too many cases, the pattern of life-styles projected by the industrialized countries contributes to this imbalance. The recent decision by WHO to adopt a voluntary code that would ban promotion of infant formulas was prompted by just that circumstance. Sales promotion techniques that encouraged the belief that breast-feeding be abandoned in favour of "modern" methods has contributed to extensive harm. Senator Edward Kennedy last week graphically posed the problem in these terms:

> "Can a product which requires clean water, good sanitation, adequate family income, and a literate parent to follow printed instructions be properly and safely used in areas where water is contaminated, sewage runs in the streets, poverty is severe, and illiteracy is high?"

... 9

In many instances, the knowledge required by developing country governments to introduce reforms falls within the agricultural or medical sciences. In many other instances, however, information is required permitting governments to judge more accurately the social and economic conditions which influence decision and which must be reflected if policy changes are to be effective in their result. Indeed, as we have come recently to know in Canada, the dimension of development which is much the most elusive of understanding and much the most resistant to alteration is the social element.

Science and technology, no matter how skillfully applied, are not the final determinants of the quality of a society. Bronowski insists on reminding us of this fact. "The ascent of man", he says, "is always teetering in the balance. There is always a sense of uncertainty, whether when man lifts his foot for the next step it is really going to come down pointing ahead. And what is ahead for us? At last the bringing together of all that we have learned, in physics and in biology, towards an understanding of where we have come; what man is."

We in Canada live in very privileged circumstances, and in the result, argue and cavil over very selfish issues. It is difficult if not impossible for us to relate to starvation and malnourishment and endemic poverty. We tend, as is natural, to push into the future these images and to delay our response to them. Albert Camus had an answer for

...10

that. In his novel "The Fall", he wrote: "Don't wait for the Last Judgment. It takes place every day."

Indeed it is taking place every day for untold numbers of persons in developing countries, a large proportion of them infants and young children. That knowledge is shared by them, by us, and by our common Creator. Added to it must be the knowledge that our failure to contribute to the remedy cannot any longer adequately be explained either economically or morally.

It is in that sense that these issues of science and technology and development and commitment must be considered. But commitment cannot be expected to flow spontaneously from governments. In a democratic society, government must be prompted by its citizenry. How effective that prompting has been will be revealed at the Western Economic Summit in Ottawa in July. I am pleased that Canada is insisting on the central significance of North-South issues. Happily, Mr. Trudeau's determination in that regard will be supported by President Mitterand who stated ten days ago on the occasion of his inauguration: "France will have to say forcefully that there can be no true international community as long as two thirds of the planet continues to trade men and wealth for hunger and contempt."

... 11

Present at that Ottawa table in July will be no representatives of the developing countries. They will join the discussions at Cancun, Mexico in October. One eloquent spokesman for the south has made an observation that could form a useful backdrop to all the discussions at all the summits. Said he:

> "Material abundance is not the sole purpose of human existence; but poverty defeats all other possibilities. Hence poverty is both the ultimate affront to conscience and a certain guarantee of instability. Surely, the supreme challenge of our times is to work together to eliminate it from human experience."

In the course of the discussions here at Antigonish, we of IDRC will seek to acquaint our Atlantic scientific colleagues with those areas in which their activities and their renowned competence can be employed for the support of research in the developing countries. In the scenic and moral setting of St. Francis Xavier I am confident that our examination of these issues will maintain the necessary balance of integrity and comprehensiveness. I look forward very much to a stimulating colloquium and, thereafter, to a rich and lengthy period of collaboration for the benefit of the peoples of the developing regions.